

PART II

WHATCOM COUNTY POPULATION

The population of Whatcom County is very unequally distributed. The majority of the people live in the western part of the county on the rich, agricultural Nooksack River plain and in the city of Bellingham. Elsewhere, the population is confined largely to the north, middle and south fork of the Nooksack River Valley. There are a few settlements in the Skagit River area in the southeastern portion of the county. Other parts of Whatcom County are nearly void of people because of the rugged terrain and lack of transportation facilities.

Population Growth

The growth of Whatcom County was slow prior to 1870. Lack of easy overland accessibility to the area and hardships involved in clearing land hindered the early immigrants. Whatcom was settled largely from west to east rather than vice versa because the western portion of the county was most readily accessible. The period 1870 to 1890 was one of rapid population growth. Opportunities in mining, logging and agriculture brought immigrants from eastern states and Europe. By 1890, the county population was 18,591.

Construction of railroads into Whatcom County brought rapid population growth. The period 1900 to 1910 was a decade when the county population more than doubled. 24,116 to 49,511. Railroads not only brought new settlers but encouraged the growth of forest, mineral and construction industries in the area. Agriculture developed to satisfy new markets and began to specialize in farm products best suited to the area. As a result, full-time and part-time farmers steadily increased in numbers.

Between 1910 and 1940 the population of Whatcom County grew at a slower rate with most of the gain during the 1920's. A relative reduction in employment opportunities and a growing scarcity of land were reflected in the slower rate of population growth. The population gained 9,755 persons during this period, from 49,511 in 1910 to 60,355 in 1940.

The 1940-1960 period witnessed a more steady rate of population growth compared with the years between 1910 and 1940. Urban population grew as new employment opportunities in manufacturing and service industries became available. The number of people in the county grew from 60,355 at the beginning of the period to 66,733 in 1950 and to 70,317 in 1960. In 1960, Whatcom County accounted for 2.5 percent of the state's 2,853,214 people.

Urban and Rural Population

Until 1890, Whatcom was entirely rural with all persons living in cities or villages under 2,500 persons, on farms or in country residences. In 1890, the neighboring cities of Fairhaven and New Whatcom together reached 8,135 persons, becoming the only places in the county classified as urban (i.e., over 2,500 persons) by the Census. Of Whatcom's population in 1890, 56 percent was rural and 44 percent was urban. Later in 1903, the cities of Fairhaven and New Whatcom were consolidated and incorporated as Bellingham city.

In 1950, Bellingham was still the only place in the county with an urban population but it accounted for over 51 percent of the county's total inhabitants

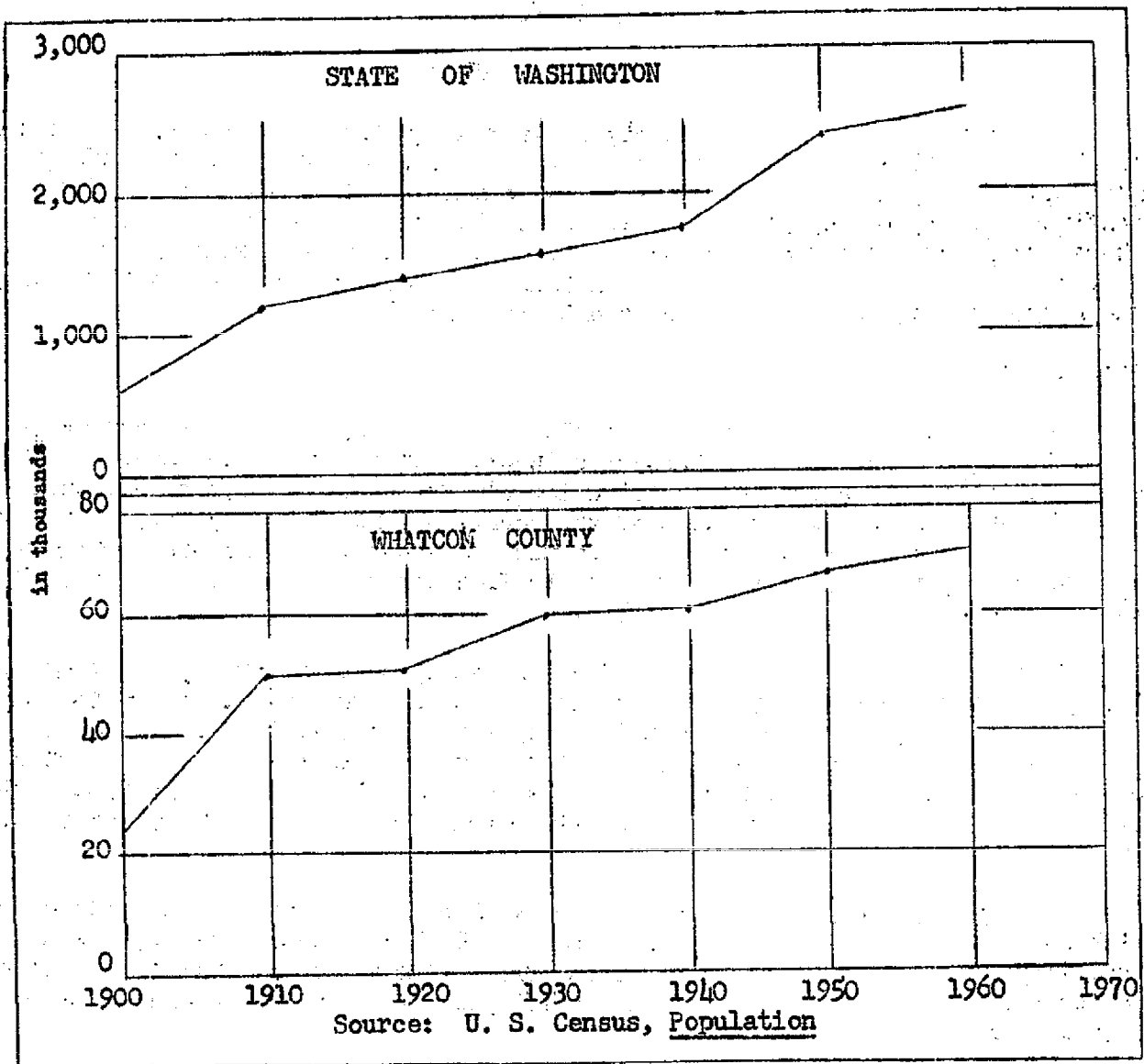


Figure 1. Population Trends: 1900-1960

Table 1. Population of Whatcom County, 1900-1960

Year	Population	Percent Rural	Percent Urban
1900	24,116	54.2	45.8
1910	49,511	51.0	49.0
1920	50,600	49.5	50.5
1930	59,128	47.9	52.1
1940	60,355	51.4	48.6
1950	66,733	48.8	51.2
1960	70,317	47.1	52.9

Source: U. S. Census, Population

By 1960, Lynden, with a population of 2,542, joined Bellingham's 34,688 persons to make up the county's urban population. Urban residents represented nearly 53 percent of the county population in 1960.

Before 1930, the percentage of rural population decreased and the urban population grew steadily. Between 1930 and 1940, however, the urban proportion of the county population dropped from 52 percent to 49 percent. This was caused by a decline in the population of Bellingham and the net increase in numbers of persons living in small towns, as well as the increase of rural-farm and nonfarm inhabitants. Since 1940, the percentage of urban population has again been on an upward trend. Although the cities have grown, about 47 percent of Whatcom County residents was considered rural in 1960. Because of considerable farming and a variety of rural industries such as logging, lumbering, mining and hydroelectric work, a large segment of the population has remained rural.

In 1960, the rural population was predominantly rural-nonfarm, consisting of 22,593 persons who lived in the country but not on farms. The rural-nonfarm persons represented 68 percent of the total rural population. Rural-farm population decreased in the two decades between 1940 and 1960. Persons living on farms numbered 17,315 in 1930, 18,528 in 1940, then dropped to 17,728 in 1950 and to 10,494 in 1960. The drop in farm population between 1950 and 1960 represents a decline of 41 percent. In 1960, Whatcom County ranked second among the counties of Washington in farm population. Both farms and people living on farms are becoming fewer, whereas the production of farm products continues to increase.

Table 2. Population of Incorporated Places
Whatcom County, 1910-1960

Incorporated City or Town	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960
Bellingham	24,298	25,585	30,823	29,314	34,112	34,688
Blaine	2,289	2,254	1,642	1,524	1,693	1,735
Everson	--	--	295	292	345	431
Ferndale	691	759	752	717	979	1,442
Lynden	1,148	1,244	1,564	1,696	2,161	2,542
Nooksack	--	283	293	302	323	318
Sumas	902	854	647	650	658	629

Source: U. S. Census, Population

Whatcom County's seven incorporated places have varied in growth since 1910. Bellingham, the major city of the county and sixth in population in the state, has shown steady growth except during the 1930's when the area's lumbering and fishing declined for a period of time. Forests stimulated Bellingham's early development and they continue to be the basic resource, but the trend has shifted from lumber to sulphite pulp, tissue paper, veneer, plywood and paperboard. Bellingham Bay is the headquarters for numerous fishing vessels plying waters of upper Puget Sound and Alaska. Some of the largest salmon canneries in the United States utilize the catch. Shipbuilding, a cement plant, and coal mining provide further diversity. The city is a trade and processing center for the county, which specializes in dairying, poultry, small fruits and vegetables. Nearness to Canada (22 miles), access to the San Juan Island group and the Mt. Baker area have made tourism an important facet of the economy. Bellingham is the site of Western Washington State College. In 1960, Bellingham's population was 34,688, which accounted for 49 percent of the county total.

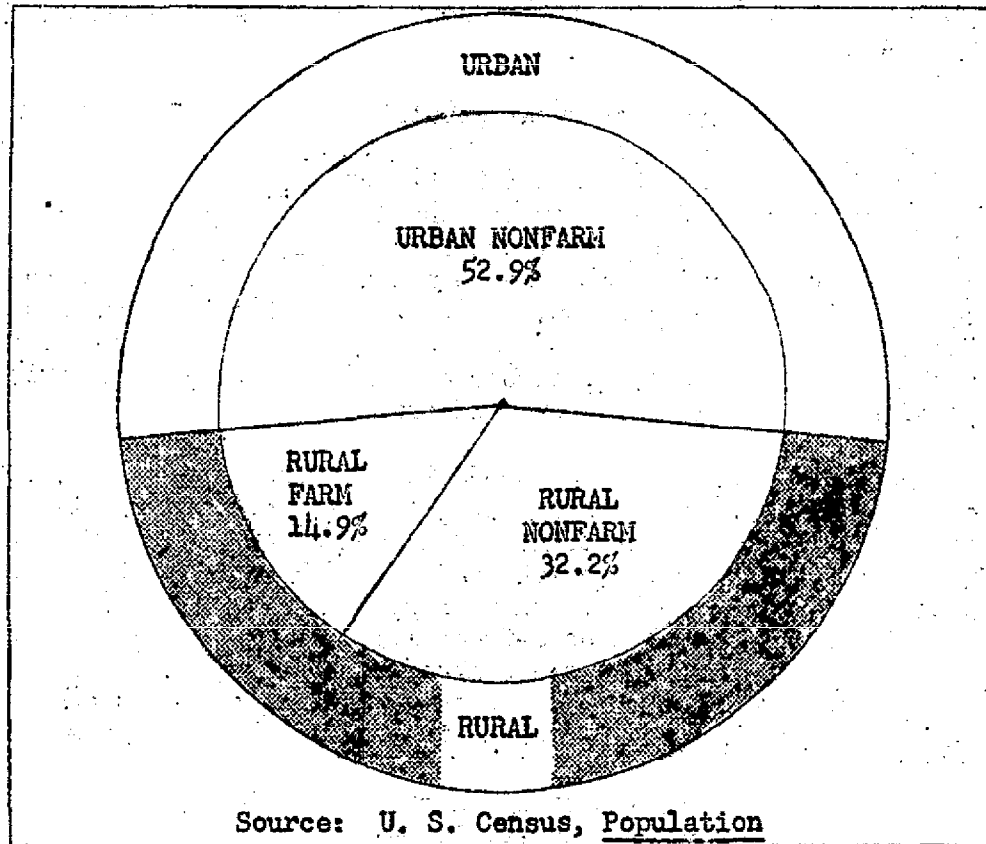


Figure 2. Population, Whatcom County, 1960.

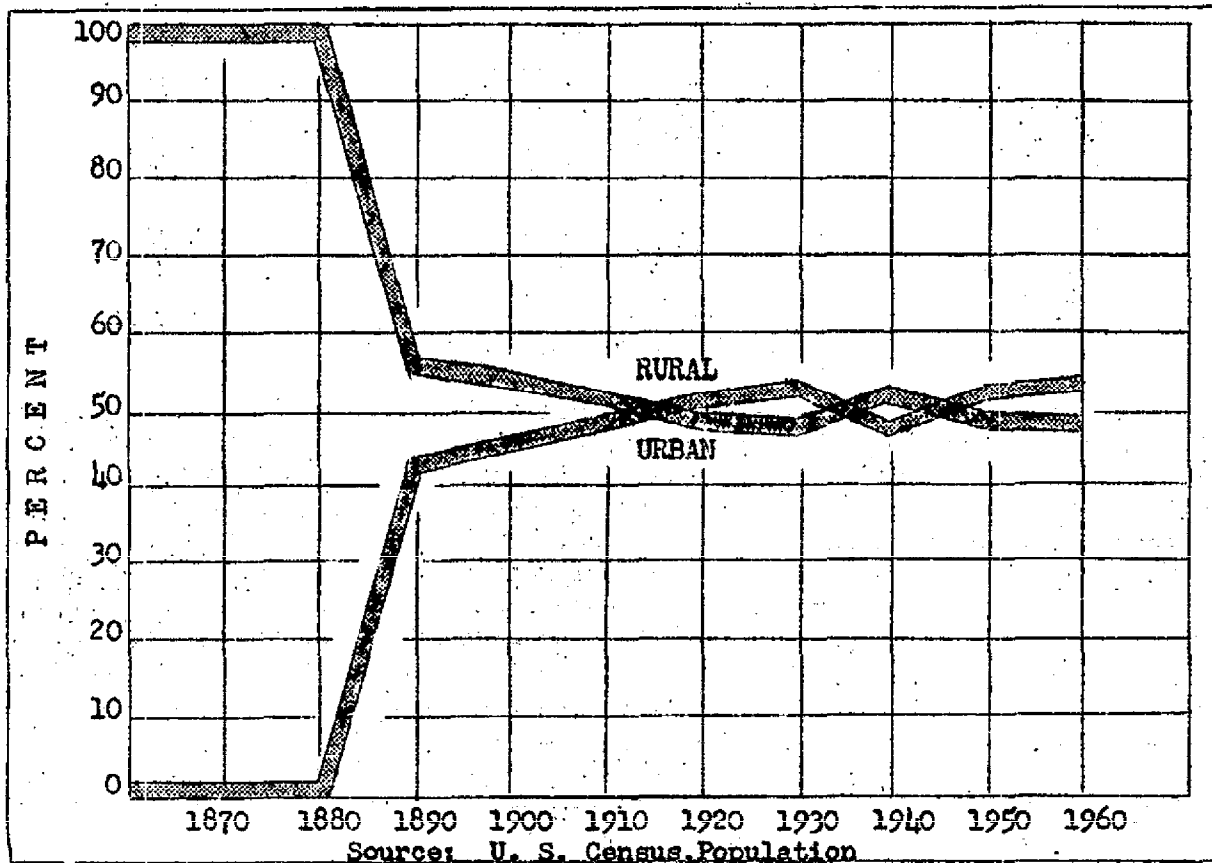


Figure 3. Population Trends: 1870-1960

Lynden, an agricultural trade, marketing and processing center in the northwestern part of the county, has grown steadily from a population of 1,148 in 1910 to 2,542 in 1960. Other communities in the agricultural northwestern portion of the county which also have grown are Ferndale, Everson and Nooksack. On the other hand, the Canadian border towns of Blaine and Sumas have decreased in population since 1910, mainly because of the decline in the local forest industries. The combined population of the seven incorporated places amounted to 41,785 in 1960, representing 59 percent of the total county population.

Population Characteristics

Typical of many counties in the western United States, Whatcom has been a melting pot of many nationalities who migrated from Europe to seek new lands and job opportunities. In 1920, over one-fifth of the county population, or 10,540 persons, came from foreign lands. As a source of early immigrants, Canada, Sweden, Norway, Germany, England, Denmark and the Netherlands lead all others. Immigrants have done much to develop Whatcom County agriculture, lumbering and fishing. The percentage of foreign-born whites in the total population has decreased as a result of the large drop in European emigration to the United States since 1920.

In 1960, foreign-born persons residing in Whatcom numbered 6,658 and represented 10 percent of the total county population. The five largest immigrant groups were English, Norwegian, Dutch, German and Swedish. About 32 percent of the county population (22,671 persons) in 1960 was of first and second generation foreign stock.

The 1960 nonwhite population of Whatcom County was 1,489, consisting of 1,339 Indians, 57 Negroes, 29 Japanese, 24 Chinese, 6 Filipinos and 34 others. The Indians live mostly on the Lummi Indian Reservation.

Table 3. Employment of the Population
Whatcom County, 1960

Types of Employment	Total Workers
<u>Total employed workers</u>	23,902
Agriculture	2,670
Forestry and Fisheries . . .	300
Mining	24
Construction	1,927
Manufacturing	4,566
Transportation, Communications and other Public Utilities	1,585
Retail and Wholesale Trade .	4,870
Miscellaneous Services . . .	6,773
Public Administration (govern- ment employment)	861
Other employment	326

Source: U. S. Census, Population

In 1960, a total of 23,902 persons was employed in the county. Miscellaneous services and retail and wholesale trade were the two leading types of employment. The Census counted 6,773 working in miscellaneous services covering many trades,

and 4,870 in retail and wholesale trade. Manufacturing was third in the number of employed persons with 4,566. A large segment of the manufacturing employment was in the lumber, wood products, and food processing industries. There were 2,670 persons working in agriculture for a living, making it fourth in rank. Those employed in agriculture represented 11 percent of all self-employed and employed persons in the county. Forestry and mining, which were important in the early days of Whatcom County, were relatively minor occupations in 1960.

The 1930 Census listed 109 males per 100 females in Whatcom County. In 1960, Whatcom's population consisted of 34,803 males and 35,514 females, a ratio of 98 males per 100 females. The number of women relative to men has increased with increasing time since initial settlement, war and industrialization. In 1960, rural men numbered 17,144 and rural women 15,943--a ratio of 108 males per 100 females.

Whatcom County's population is aging. The percentage of older people has been increasing steadily since the early pioneers first settled in the area. The 1930 Census showed only 8 percent of the people in the county were 65 years old and over, whereas in 1960 they accounted for 13 percent of the total. Improved health practices and greater medical knowledge have played an important part in lengthening the life span. In 1960, the largest single age group was that from 5 to 9 years of age. Children under 5 years old formed the second largest group while those between 10 and 14 years were third. Children under 15 years of age accounted for 30 percent of the county's population.

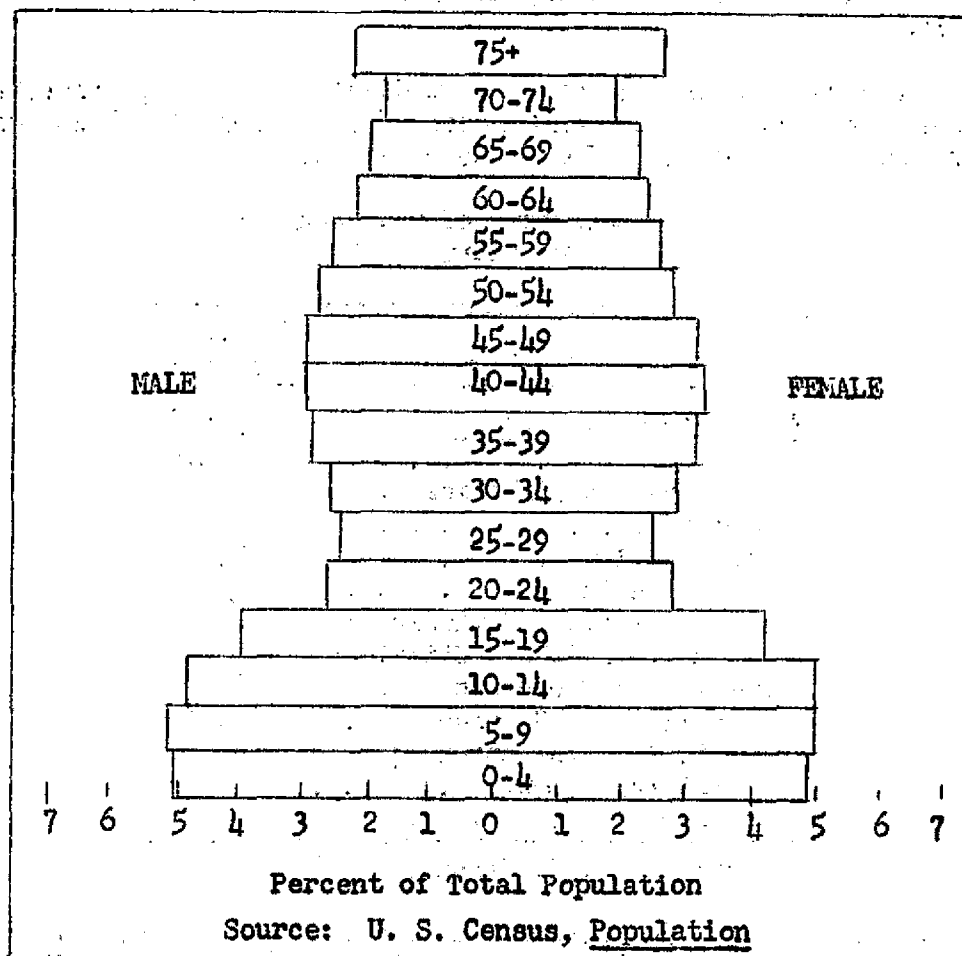


Figure 4. Age Distribution of Population, Whatcom County, 1960